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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 000607

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/MARCHESE/HARDING

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TAGS: [IS](#) [LE](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#)  
SUBJECT: LEBANON: ARCHBISHOP AUDI FEARS TRIBUNAL WILL  
ESCALATE TENSIONS

REF: BEIRUT 569

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman. Reason: Section 1.4 (b)  
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SUMMARY

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11. (C) In a 4/27 meeting with the Ambassador, Archbishop Elias Audi, the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Beirut, had no additional information on the attacks of the two murdered youths found last evening south of Beirut, but hoped it was not politically motivated because this could further escalate already high tensions in the country. Audi, who in the past has supported the establishment of the tribunal, now expressed worry that it might create a more dangerous situation. Audi believed the best protection for Lebanon, and to prevent more violence, was to develop a new relationship with Syria and deal with Hizballah's arms. He found Speaker Berri's failure to convene parliament shameful, but noted Berri had no room to maneuver. Audi does not believe presidential elections will occur in November, unless some positive change occurs to break the stalemate. Regarding the rumors (reftel) of former Deputy Prime Minister Issam Fares heading up Lebanese cabinet to compete with Siniora's legitimate government, Audi said that he would strongly advise Fares (a Greek Orthodox) to reject such a poisoned chalice. End summary.

FEARS OUTSIDE FORCES, REVENGE ESCALATING TENSIONS

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12. (C) In a meeting with the Ambassador and Econoff, Audi had no additional information on the murder of the two youths (aged 12 and 25) whose families belonged to Walid Jumblatt's Progressive Socialist Party. He expressed hope that the murders were not politically motivated because this would escalate the already high tensions in the country. He believed one of the reasons the situation was so tense was because the Lebanese do not control their own future. His impression was that Lebanese leaders are not united, and it is clear that outside forces manipulate Lebanon's internal politics and politicians act primarily for their own personal gain. This has created a fear of the future where anything can happen. He also expressed his belief that Lebanon had been used in proxy wars for the region. He was hopeful, however, that political leaders were sincere in their calls for calm, because considerable fuel for conflict exists in Lebanon right now and Audi fears Lebanon is now stuck in a cycle of violence. He praised Walid Jumblatt's efforts upon the discovery of the victims to prevent further revenge

killings saying, "Walid is wise and getting wiser."

TRIBUNAL COULD CAUSE MORE HARM THAN GOOD

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13. (C) Once a solid advocate for the establishment of the UN tribunal to try suspects in the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, Audi now worries that, after the killings this week, he is less sure the tribunal will benefit Lebanon. He fears it might further increase tensions between Sunni and Shia, or possibly even create waves of car bombings and suicide attacks like Iraq. While he believes most Lebanese want to know who was behind the assassination, he fears that establishing the tribunal might now create more instability and is incredulous that, despite the numerous assassinations and a two-year investigation, nobody seems to know anything. In the past, he believed establishing the tribunal would help the population feel safe and give closure on the tragic events of February 2005. He noted that if the tribunal takes another two to three years to conclude its process, "they" might destroy Lebanon completely by then.

BEST PROTECTION IS TO DEAL WITH SYRIA AND HIZBALLAH

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14. (C) Audi believed the best protection for Lebanon, as well as prevent further violence, would be to establish well-set rules and regulations for a new relationship with Syria. He desires Lebanon's independence and sovereignty, but commented that Syria will always be involved in Lebanon. He argued that a "sister-to-sister" relationship has to be developed, otherwise Lebanon's peaceful existence will be threatened and he concluded the Lebanese cannot constantly

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live under threat. Audi seemed perplexed that Syria could not seem to accept an independent Lebanon and claimed not to know the psychology of Syrian rulers. He believed that Syria wanted a good relationship with the international community, and maybe this can be used as leverage to convince Syria to change its relationship with Lebanon. The Ambassador queried Audi on whether or not he thought Hizballah was blocking the tribunal because of its own fears of involvement, or merely at the Syrian behest. Audi deflected the question by noting that during the National Dialogue in early January 2006, all Lebanese parties agreed to establish the tribunal.

15. (C) Moreover, he stated that Lebanon's situation is abnormal. While Hizballah has arms, the Army has few arms, and while he is not against Hizballah as a political force, he contended that it cannot be stronger than the state. He declared that you cannot have a "resistance" that threatens the country. Audi commented that when he hears Hizballah Secretary General Nasrallah speak, he feels as though he is

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listening to a "Roman Emperor," as if Nasrallah controls the country entirely. He stated that Hizballah was primarily a Lebanese movement, but at times it is not part of the country because of its broader religious ties in the region. Additionally, Iran's involvement in Lebanon makes the situation more complicated. He believes Lebanon is part of Iran's broader regional strategy.

BERRI STUCK WITH THE OPPOSITION

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16. (C) Audi noted that Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri's failure to convene parliament was "shameful" and counter to the will of the people. He believes Berri often acts against his own wishes to save himself and his Amal Movement, and is therefore not free. Without his alliance to Hizballah, Berri and his Amal would be nothing. Audi believes that deep down (very deep down), Berri is a true Lebanese. Audi stated with confidence that he knows that Berri does not like Hizballah. Audi told the Ambassador, that while he does not know for

sure, he believes that when Berri knows Hizballah officials will be attending functions, Berri will often find an excuse not to attend.

#### PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS UNLIKELY

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¶17. (C) Audi does not believe presidential elections will occur in November unless some positive change occurs to break the stalemate. He does not believe there is enough national will to persuade the opposition members of parliament, whose attendance is necessary to achieve a two-thirds quorum, to exercise their duty to elect the president. When asked if some of Michel Aoun's bloc might not be willing to attend the critical parliament session, he stated that while Aoun's people often do not agree with him, they are unlikely to break with him. He stated Aoun's people seem to believe that if they are not allied with Aoun, they will not enjoy any political future. Thus, even those who do not like the direction Aoun has taken them have no choice but to stick with him.

¶18. (C) Audi clearly is worried that the Lebanese do not seem to realize they are free to make their own choices. He commented several times how there was no sense of nationalism or sense of "belonging" to the country, and this is a fundamental national weakness. Audi told the Ambassador he was troubled by his discussions with Lebanon's youth, because their generation grew up in time of war and that is all they expect. Many, he concluded, especially Christians, are leaving the country for good.

#### ISSAM FARES WOULD BE WELL-ADVISED NOT TO SERVE AS INTERIM PRIME MINISTER

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¶19. (C) Audi confirmed that he, too, had heard the recent rumors about former Deputy Prime Minister Issam Fares (reftel), according to which President Emile Lahoud would, as his last act in office, appoint Fares prime minister and acting chief of state. It would be disastrous for Lebanon to have two governments, Audi said, expressing admiration for the leadership of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora. Audi said that he had not talked with Fares (a Greek Orthodox), but he did not believe that Fares would have any interest in

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accepting the appointment. Audi said that he would certainly advise Fares strongly not to accept such a poisoned chalice.

#### COMMENT

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¶10. (C) Audi, who is personally charming, traditionally plays a very cautious political game, no doubt due in large part to the fact that he reports to a Damascus-based archbishop. Over the past two years, as his community suffered the brunt of the assassinations or attempts -- Samir Kassir, George Hawi, Elias Murr, Gebran Tueni -- the bishop had become increasingly vocal in favor of Lebanon's sovereignty and independence. For the one-year commemoration of MP Gebran Tueni's assassination, Audi spoke from his pulpit in strong support of the creation of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. His backtracking now is linked, we believe, to the deep worries people have that the kidnappings and murders of two young Lebanese last week is only the start of a new campaign of terror. But, fortunately, Audi has not shifted back to the fence: his 4/29 Sunday sermon pointedly called on Nabih Berri to open parliament, a position indicating that he still shares March 14 values.

FELTMAN